

# FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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Commissioner of Education



February 17, 2006

The Honorable Margaret Spellings  
Secretary of Education  
United States Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Spellings:

Last April, Florida met your challenge to provide compelling evidence of our commitment to the principles of NCLB by documenting our successes on all measures of rising student achievement. This year, we have again accepted your challenge and responded with a growth model proposal that honors the “bright lines” of the law by continuing to assess all students annually, disaggregate data, and above all, close the achievement gap.

Florida’s proposal includes two components—a growth model component and an improvement model—closing the achievement gap component. The proposed growth model provides schools and districts with a way to make AYP when students are “on track to be proficient” based on a “three-year growth trajectory.” Simply put, a student’s current and prior year assessment data will be used to determine if the current rate of student learning applied to the next three years will get the student to proficiency. Our closing the achievement gap component is also focused on student proficiency. The closing the gap improvement component examines subgroups that did not make AYP via the other methods, status, safe harbor, or growth, but have closed the gap on state proficiency by improving the percent of proficient students in the subgroup by more than the state average. This enhancement will recognize the efforts schools are making to improve (reduce) the achievement gap.

These ideas are not new to Florida. Florida’s 2003 approved NCLB Accountability Plan established our commitment to develop a plan to utilize annual learning gain targets to proficiency for students who have not yet reached the proficiency threshold. Our proposal is evidence of our commitment to deliver on this plan. Florida is able to set these targets using Florida’s FCAT developmental scale scores (DSS). This continuous scale begins low in third grade and reaches its maximum in tenth grade, ranging from 0 to 3000. The DSS allows student growth to be monitored from one tested grade to the next and has been reported since 2000-01.

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Our proposal brings Florida's A+ Plan and NCLB into closer alignment. Several of Florida's legislative leaders have expressed support for this proposal to include a growth component, as well as several of our school district superintendents and coordinators of assessment and accountability (see attached letters of support). Because these changes may impact this year's accountability decisions, Florida will continue to share this proposal with other education leaders. A copy of our Talking Points document is provided.

Florida has demonstrated rising student achievement and a commitment to the principles of NCLB since the implementation of Florida's A+ Plan and our dedication to research-driven policy (see the enclosed documents, *Florida's A+ Approach: Ensuring Every Child Gains a Year's Worth of Knowledge in a Year's Time* and *Raising Student Achievement: Florida's Compelling Evidence*). This proposal upholds Florida's high standards and supports the intent of NCLB, keeping us on the path to ensuring that all students are proficient by 2013-14. Thank you for this opportunity to bring both our state and federal accountability systems closer together. I stand ready to provide additional information or data to support our proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John L. Winn". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline.

John L. Winn  
Commissioner